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The Spirit of Hajj

It is incumbent upon Muslims to perform Hajj, at least once in a lifetime, as long as they possess the means. As is clear from the following excerpts from the Qur'an and Hadith, Hajj is one important pillar among the five foundation pillars of Islam:

“Pilgrimage to the House is a duty to Allah for all who can make the Journey.” (3:97)

“The first House ever to be built for man was that at Mecca, a blessed place, a beacon for the nations.” (3:96)

“There are five basic pillars of Islam,” said the Prophet Muhammad: “To bear testimony that there is no deity save Allah, and that Muhammad is His Prophet; to establish prayer and pay the poor-due; to make pilgrimage to the House, and fast during Ramadan.”

The root meaning of the word “Hajj” is “to set out” or “to make pilgrimage.” Canonically, it has come to refer to a Muslim act of worship, performed annually, in which the worshipper circumambulates the House of God in Mecca, stays a while in the plains of Arafat and performs other rites which together constitute Hajj - the act of pilgrimage.

Hajj is a comprehensive act of worship, involving both financial outlay and physical exertion. Both remembrance of God and sacrifice for His sake are part and parcel of Hajj. Hajj is an act of worship in which the spirit of all acts of worship has, in some way or another, been brought into play.

The sacred duties of Hajj revolve around the House of God in Mecca. What does the House of God represent to a believer? It brings to life a whole prophetic tradition, stretching from Abraham to Muhammad. The House of God stands as a model of true faith in God, and submission to the Master of the House. “The Prophets gave up everything and followed the Lord,” is the message that rings out from the Lord’s House; leave all and follow Him. They were obedient to His will; be you so also. They served His cause on earth; serve Him until you die, and you will prosper forever.”

The journey to Hajj is a journey to God. It represents the ultimate closeness one can achieve to God while living in this world. Other acts of worship are ways of remembering God; Hajj is a way of reaching Him. Generally we worship Him on an unseen level; in Hajj we worship Him as if we saw Him face to face. When a pilgrim stands before the House of God it seems to him that he is standing before God Himself. He is then moved to revolve around the Lord’s House, like a butterfly encircling a flower, clinging to His doorstep as a slave begging for his master’s mercy.

The uniqueness of Hajj lies in the unique nature of the place in which it is performed. Throughout the ages, Mecca has remained a venue for the manifestation of God’s signs. It was here that the great communicator of the divine message, the Prophet Abraham, made a memorial to man’s life of belief and submission. And it was here, following in the same tradition, that the foundation of Islamic history was

laid: fourteen hundred years ago the Prophet Muhammad changed the spiritual face of Arabia, from one littered by many godheads, to one illuminated by the countenance of the One God.

Much history lies behind the rich and noble tradition existing in Hijaz. It is a land that has received God's special grace. The spiritual wealth it has on offer is enough to enrich any poor traveller, enough to revive any languid heart. A sea of divine mercy flows where only sand and sky meet the eye, in the environs of Mecca and Medina. There the pilgrim washes and is cleansed.

Among all Muslim acts of worship, Hajj holds a prominent position. In one hadith, the Prophet called it the supreme act of worship. But it is not just the rites of pilgrimage that constitute this importance; it is the spirit in which Hajj is performed. Let us put this another way and say that it is not merely a matter of going to Mecca and returning. There is much more to Hajj than that. Hajj has been prescribed so that it may inspire us with new religious fervour. To return from Hajj with one's faith in God strengthened and rekindled – that is the hallmark of a true pilgrim. Hajj only takes its place as a supreme act of worship when it is undertaken in its true spirit, and performed in the proper manner. It will then be the greatest act in a pilgrim's life: he will never be the same again.

To make Hajj is to meet God. When the pilgrim reaches Meeqat, the border of the Sacred Territory, he is filled with awe of God: he feels that he is leaving his own world, and entering God's. Now he is touching the Lord, revolving around Him, running towards Him, journeying on His behalf, making sacrifice in His name, smiting His enemies, praying to the Lord and seeing his prayer answered.

The House of God in Mecca is one of God's signs on earth. There, souls, which have strayed from the Lord, take comfort in Him once again; hearts, which have become hard as stone are brought low before Almighty God; eyes, which have lost their vision, are filled with divine radiance. But these blessings of Hajj are available only to those who come prepared for them. Otherwise Hajj will be just a tour, a visit that leaves no lasting impression upon its perpetrator.

"Hajj is to stand in the plains of Arafat." These words of the Prophet Muhammad illustrate the importance of sojourning in that place. The plain of Arafat, in which pilgrims spend one day, presents a picture of the arena of the Judgement Day. Host upon host of God's servants flock in from all sides to witness the spectacle. And what a spectacle! All are dressed in similar, simple attire. There is nothing to single any person out. All are reciting the same words: "Here we are at Your service, Lord." How can one who witnesses this spectacle but call to mind the like of this verse of the Qur'an:

"When the Trumpet is blown, and behold, from the graves they rush forth to their Lord,"
(36:51)

The pilgrims gather on the plain of Arafat in order to recall the time when they will gather on the plain of the last day. What they will experience in practice in the next world, they conjure up visions of it in this world.

For all these reasons, Hajj reigns supreme among all acts of devotion. Like the Sacred Mosque in Mecca has a status above all other mosques, so the worship that is performed there – as part of the pilgrimage – stands head and shoulders above all other acts of devotion.

Women in Islam

THE historical study of men and women not just as social entities, but as major parts of God's creation, shows them as having the right as such, to equal status and respect. Difference in their physique and capabilities reflects the degree of specialization in their biological make-up. If nature has decreed that man and woman should have different attributes and functions, it is so that, rather than duplicate each other, they should complement each other. And so long as they interact in this complementarity the dictates of both nature and society are satisfactorily fulfilled.

From this respect men and women can be likened to a cart running on two wheels. Each of the wheels contributes equally to the running of the cart. Even if only one of the wheels goes out of order, the cart will stop. The way a cart traverses its path with the help of the two wheels, exactly in the same way, with mutual cooperation of men and women, the system of life can be run efficiently.

Thus the biological division of human beings into male and female is the result of purposeful planning by the Creator.

In Islam, a woman enjoys the same status as that of a man. There is no difference between man and woman as regards status, rights and blessings, both in this world and in the hereafter. Both are considered equal participants in the carrying out of the functions of daily living.

Here are some further quotations from the Qur'an and hadith regarding the position of women in Islam.

Women shall with justice have rights similar to those exercised against them. (2:228)

Women shall have a share in what their parents and kinsmen leave; whether it be little or much, it is legally theirs. (4:7)

... Those that have faith and do good works, both men and women, shall enter the Gardens of Paradise and receive blessings without measure. (40:20)

Words of the Prophet Muhammad

The following traditions of the Prophet indicate the elevated function of woman in Islam:

Women are half of men.

Fear God in respect of women.

Heaven lies beneath the feet of mothers. (That is, those who serve their mothers well are deserving of Paradise.)

The best among you is he who is best for his family. For my family, I am the best of all of you.

The most perfect man of religion is one who excels in character. The best among you is he who gives the best treatment to his womenfolk.

This makes it clear that, although males and females differ from one another biologically, they are equal in terms of human status. No distinction is made between women and men as regards their respective rights. This is all to the good if they are to be lifetime companions.

Man and woman in the eyes of Islam then are not the duplicates of one another, but the complements. This concept permits the shortcomings of one sex to be compensated for by the strengths of the other.

It is a fact that women in general are not physically as strong as men, but their physical weakness in no way implies their inferiority to men. The eyes are the most delicate parts of our body, while the nails by comparison are extremely hard. That does not mean that the nails are superior to the eyes.

Just as two different kinds of fruits will differ in colour, taste, shape and texture, without one being superior or inferior to the other, so also do men and women have their different qualities which distinguish the male from the female without there being any question of superiority or inferiority. They are endowed by nature with different capacities so that they may play their respective roles in life with greater ease and effectiveness.

However, in respect of innate talents all individuals, be they men or women, differ from one another. Yet their need for each other is equal. All are of equal value. One is not more important or less important than the other. Similarly when it comes to the establishment of a home and raising of a family, men and women have their separate roles to play. But each is vital. Each is indispensable to the other. And for them to come together, function in unison and live in harmony, there must be mutual respect and a prevailing sense that a difference of biological function does not imply inequality. For the biological division of human beings into male and female is the result of the purposeful planning of our Creator.

In Islam, a woman enjoys the same status as that of a man. But in ancient times, women had come to be considered inferior and were deprived, among other things, of the right to inherit property. Islam for the first time in human history gave them their due legal rights over property. Neither did it distinguish between men and women as regards status, rights and blessings, both in this world and the Hereafter. Both were considered equal participants in the carrying out of the functions of daily living. As the Qur'an so aptly puts it: "You are members, one of another."

Since the earliest, ideal phase of Islam Muslim women have successfully exploited their talents towards the field of education in particular. Homes had become centres of learning. As women performed their role without going outdoors, there is a general impression that Islam has restricted women's workplace to performing only domestic chores. But this is not the truth. First of all Islam encouraged them to receive education, then enthused them with a new zeal. Subsequently, they went out to impart this learning to the next generation. Let's take the instance of the Prophet's wives, held up as role models for women in Islam. Preserving their femininity, they participated in all kinds of religious and worldly activities. For instance, Prophet's wife Aisha, having gained full knowledge of Islam from the Prophet,

was able, after the death of the Prophet, to perform the task of teacher and guide to the Muslim community for a period of about fifty years. Abdullah ibn Abbas, a Companion of great stature, and one of the best commentators of the Qur'an, was one of Aisha's pupils.

As modern day research tells us women are better with words than men. It is perhaps this reason why they are able to run educational institutions successfully. Besides this there may be many such workplaces where women are able to exploit their full potential. Since earliest days of Islam we find Muslim women working outdoors. Umm Dahdah, wife of a Companion of the Prophet worked in her orchard. Khadija, Prophet's wife conducted business, to cite only a few of such examples. However, Islam sets great value on the proper management of home. It is because home is the most important unit of any society. Home is the centre of preparing succeeding generations. Thus neglecting home front will amount to neglecting the next generation, which in turn will result in a great national loss.

I would say that Islam grants even more respect to women than to men. According to one hadith a man once came to the Prophet and asked him who rightfully deserved the best treatment from him.

"Your mother," said the Prophet. "Who's next?" asked the man. "Your mother." "Who comes next?" the man asked again. The Prophet again replied, "Your mother." "Who is after that" insisted the man. "Your father," said the Prophet.

Another example concerns Hajra, Ibrahim's wife. Hajj, regarded as the greatest form of worship in Islam, entails the performance of *Sai*, one of the main rites of the Hajj. This is accomplished by running back and forth seven times between Safa and Marwah, two hillocks near the Kaba. This running, enjoined upon every pilgrim, be they rich or poor, literate or illiterate, kings or commoners, is in imitation of the desperate quest of Hajar, Abraham's wife, for water to quench the thirst of her crying infant four thousand years ago. The performance of this rite is a lesson in struggling for the cause of God. It is of the utmost significance that this was an act performed by a woman. Perhaps there could be no better demonstration of a woman's greatness than God's command to all men, literally to follow in her footsteps.

We can see that the principle implied by the expression 'ladies first' in modern times had already been established in Islam at the very outset.

Non-Violence and Islam-I

NON-VIOLENCE should never be confused with inaction or passivity. Non-violence is action in the full sense of the word. Rather it is more forceful an action than that of violence. It is a fact that non-violent activism is more powerful and effective than violent activism.

Non-violent activism is not limited in its sphere. It is a course of action, which may be followed in all matters.

Whenever individuals, groups or communities are faced with a problem, one way to solve it is by resorting to violence. The better way is to attempt to solve the problem by peaceful means, avoiding violence and confrontation. Peaceful means may take various forms. In fact, it is the nature of the problem, which will determine which of these peaceful methods, is applicable to the given situation.

Islam is a religion, which teaches non-violence. According to the Qur'an, God does not love *fasad*, violence. What is meant here by *fasad* is clearly expressed in verse 205 of the second *surah*. Basically, *fasad* is that action which results in disruption of the social system, causing huge losses in terms of lives and property.

Conversely, we can say with certainty that God loves non-violence. He abhors violent activity being indulged in human society, as a result of which people have to pay the price with their possessions and lives. This is supported by other statements in the Qur'an. For instance, we are told in the Qur'an that peace is one of God's names (59:23). Those who seek to please God are assured by verse 5 of the sixteenth *surah* that they will be guided by Him to "the paths of peace." Paradise, which is the final destination of the society of God's choice, is referred to in the Qur'an as "the home of peace" (89:30), etc.

The entire spirit of the Qur'an is in consonance with this concept. For instance, the Qur'an attaches great importance to patience. In fact, patience is set above all other Islamic virtues with the exceptional promise of reward beyond measure. (39:10)

Patience implies a peaceful response or reaction, whereas impatience implies a violent response. The word *sabr* exactly expresses the notion of non-violence as it is understood in modern times. That patient action is non-violent action has been clearly expressed in the Qur'an. According to one tradition, the Prophet of Islam observed: God grants to *rifq* (gentleness) what he does not grant to *unf* (violence). (*Sunan*, Abu Dawood, 4/255)

The word *rifq* has been used in this hadith as an antithesis to *unf*. These terms convey exactly what is meant by violence and non-violence in present times. This hadith clearly indicates the superiority of the non-violent method.

God grants on non-violence what He does not grant to violence is no simple matter. It has very wide and deep implications. It embodies an eternal law of nature. By the very law of nature all bad things are associated with violence, while all good things are associated with non-violence.

Violent activities breed hatred in society, while non-violent activities elicit love. Violence is the way of destruction while non-violence is the way of construction. In an atmosphere of violence, it is enmity which flourishes, while in an atmosphere of non-violence, it is friendship, which flourishes. The method of violence gives way to negative values while the method of non-violence is marked by positive values. The method of violence embroils people in problems, while the method of non-violence leads people to the exploiting of opportunities. In short, violence is death, non-violence is life.

Both the Qur'an and the hadith have attached great importance to *jihad*. What is *jihad*? *Jihad* means struggle, to struggle one's utmost. It must be appreciated at the outset that this word is used for non-violent struggle as opposed to violent struggle. One clear proof of this is the verse of the Qur'an (25:52) which says: Perform *jihad* with this (i.e. the word of the Qur'an) most strenuously.

The Qur'an is not a sword or a gun. It is a book of ideology. In such a case performing *jihad* with the Qur'an would mean an ideological struggle to conquer peoples' hearts and minds through Islam's superior philosophy.

In the light of this verse of the Qur'an, *jihad* in actual fact is another name for peaceful activism or non-violent activism. Where *qital* is violent activism, *jihad* is non-violent activism.

Peaceful Beginning

When the Qur'an began to be revealed, the first verse of the revelation conveyed the injunction: 'Read!' (*Iqra*) (96:1). By perusing this verse we learn about the initiation of Islamic action. It begins from the point where there is hope of continuing the movement along peaceful lines, and not from that point where there are chances of its being marred by violence.

When the command of '*Iqra*' was revealed, there were many options available in Mecca as starting points for a movement. For instance, one possible starting point was to launch a movement to purify the Kabah of the 360 idols installed in it. But, by pursuing such a course the Islamic movement would certainly have had to face a violent reaction from the Quraysh. An alternative starting point could have been an attempt to secure a seat in the Dar-al-Nadwa (Mecca's parliament). At that time almost the whole of Arabia was under the direct or indirect influence of the Roman and Sasanid empires. If the freeing of Arabia from this influence had been made the starting point, this would also have been met with an immediate violent reaction on the part of the Quraysh.

Leaving aside these options, the path followed was that of reading the Qur'an, an activity that could be with certainty continued along peaceful lines: no violent reaction would ensue from engaging in such an activity.

The Prophet of Islam followed this principle throughout his life. His policy was that of adopting non-violent methods in preference to violent methods. It is this policy which was referred to by Aishah, the Prophet's wife, in these words: Whenever the Prophet had to opt for one of two ways, he almost always opted for the easier one. (*Fathul Bari* 6/654)

What are the advantages of non-violent activism over violent activism? They are briefly stated as under:

1. According to the Qur'an there are two faculties in every human being which are mutually antipathetic. One is the ego, and the other is the conscience called respectively *nafs ammara* and *nafs lawwama*. (The Qur'an, 12:53; 75:26) What the violent method invariably does is to awaken the ego which necessarily results in a breakdown of social equilibrium. On the other hand, non-violent activism awakens the conscience. From this results an awakening in people of introspection and self-appraisal. And according to the Qur'an, the miraculous outcome of this is that "he who is your enemy will become your dearest friend." (41 :34)

2. A great advantage of the non-violent method is that, by following it, no part of one's time is wasted. The opportunities available in any given situation may then be exploited to the fullest extent – as happened after the no-war pact of Hudaibiya. This peace treaty enabled the energies of the believers to be utilised in peaceful constructive activities instead of being dissipated in a futile armed encounter. One great harm done by violent activism is the breaking of social traditions in the launching of militant movements. Conversely, the great benefit that accrues from non-violent activism is that it can be initiated and prolonged with no damage to tradition.

Generally speaking, attempts to improve or replace existing systems by violent activism are counter-productive. One coup d'état is often the signal for a series of coups and counter-coups, none of which benefit the common man. The truly desirable revolution is that which permits gradual and beneficial changes. And this can be achieved only on the basis of non-violence.

Success Through the Non-violence Method

All the great successes of the first phase of Islam as well as the succeeding periods were achieved by non-violent methods. Listed below are some examples of these successes.

1. Of the 23 year period of prophethood, the initial 13 years were spent by the Prophet in Mecca. The Prophet fully adopted the way of pacifism or non-violence during this time. There were many such issues in Mecca at that time which could have been the subject of clash and confrontation. But, sedulously avoiding all such issues, the Prophet of Islam strictly limited his sphere to peaceful propagation of the word of God. This resulted in *Dawah* work being performed in full force throughout this period. One of the great gains during these 13 years of *dawah* work was the entry into the Islamic fold of men of the highest moral calibre who were responsible for forming the history of Islam, for instance, Abu Bakr, Umar, Usman and Ali, etc.

2. In Mecca when the Quraysh leaders were set to wage war against the Prophet, even then, instead of opting for the way of reaction and retaliation, what the Prophet did was to secretly migrate to Medina.

Migration, by its very nature, was a clear example of non-violent activism. This peaceful strategy enabled the Prophet and his followers, about two hundred in number, to form a powerful centre of Islam in Medina. Had they adopted the path of confrontation instead of peaceful migration, the history of Islam might have been buried right there in Mecca shortly after its inception.

3. After the emigration, his antagonists took the unilateral decision to wage war against him. Consequently such bloody encounters as those of Badr and Uhud took place. Then the Prophet made a 10-year peace treaty known in history as Sulh al-Hudaybiya, by accepting all the conditions of his opponents. This has been called a 'clear victory' in the Qur'an. It is this peace treaty, paving the way for peaceful constructive activities which ultimately made possible the conquest of Mecca and the whole of Arabia.

4. By the end of the pious caliphate, a bloody encounter took place between the Banu Hashim and the Banu Umayya. This stopped the advance of Islam for a period of ten years. What set this process in motion once again was the voluntary withdrawal of Hasan ibn Ali (d. 50 A.H.) from the battlefield. This was undeniably a practical form of non-violent activism. This peaceful move on the part of Hasan ibn Ali re-opened to Islam the locked doors of progress.

5. During the last days of the Abbasid caliphate Mongol tribes attacked the Muslim world and right from Samarkand to Aleppo destroyed the entire Muslim world. The history of Islam had apparently come to a standstill. At that moment the spirit of *dawah* work was born within the Muslims. As a result, the majority of the Mongols converted to Islam. And that miracle took place which has been described by an orientalist in these words: "The religion of Muslims has conquered where their arms had failed."

6. Islamic history took a crucial turn when, in the years succeeding the pious caliphate, rot had set in the system of the government, and the caliphate had turned into monarchy. At that juncture, many factors emerged which would result in clash and confrontation between the ruler and the ruled. But, following the guidance of the Prophet, the Muslims totally avoided political confrontation. This history beginning with the Umayyad caliphate, continued for several centuries. This was possible because the *tabieen* (companions of the Prophet's companions) and their succeeding generations, consisting of traditionists, jurists, ulema, sufis and other great religious scholars, all scrupulously avoided any clash or confrontation with the rulers.

It was during this period that peaceful dawah work was started in various countries and the disciplines of hadith, fiqh and other Islamic sciences came into existence on a large scale after a long period of great ideological struggle. All the precious books which adorn our libraries, all the classical literature of Islam are the result of these peaceful activities.

For instance, the hadith as a source of shariah is second only to the Qur'an in Islam. These traditions now exist in the form of printed books. These books are so precious that, without them, it would not have been possible to develop Islam into a complete system as it exists today. During the Umayyads and Abbasids, when the political system had begun to deteriorate, where were these tens of thousands of traditions. All of them existed in the memory of the religious scholars, whose names are mentioned in the books as chains in the link of authorities who have handed this legacy down to us. Had they adopted the principle of violent activism and clashed with the 'oppressive' rulers, they would all have been slaughtered by them and the entire legacy of traditions instead of finding a place on the pages of books, would have been buried along with them in the graveyards. It is by the miracle of having adopted non-violence instead of violence that the precious sources of our traditions have survived in book form and, till today, adorn our libraries.

Political Revolt Unlawful

Despite the blatant perversion in the Muslim rulers after the pious caliphate, the Muslim ulema did not lead an insurrection against these corrupt individuals. For about a period of one thousand years they remained detached in this matter and continued to engage all their efforts in non-material fields. This was not a matter of accident but in obedience to the injunctions of the shariah.

As we know, in the books of hadith detailed traditions have been set down in the chapters titled 'kitabul fitan'. The Prophet of Islam observed in plain words that in later times perversions would set in the rulers, they would become tyrannical and unjust, but that Muslims should not wield their swords against them. They should rather move to the mountains with their goats and camels.

By 'goats and camels' are meant the opportunities in non-political fields which exist, even when the political institutions are corrupted. This injunction given by the Prophet meant that the Muslims should avail of such opportunities by avoiding clash and confrontation in the political field. In short, by ignoring the political problem, they should avail of the non-political opportunities.

These injunctions of the Prophet of Islam were so clear that the Muslim ulema of later times formed a consensus to make insurrection against the rulers unlawful.

Imam An-Nawawi, commenting upon some traditions as set forth by Sahih Muslim (*Kitab Al-Imarah*) observes: "You should not come into conflict with the rulers in matters of their power. Even if you find them going against express Islamic injunctions, you should attempt to make the truth clear to them solely through words of wisdom and advice. So far as revolt and war against them in order to unseat them is concerned, that is totally unlawful according to the consensus of the ulema, even when the rulers are *zalim* and *fasiq* (tyrants and evil)." (Sahih Muslim, Bisharh An-Nawawi, 12/229)

This command of the Prophet, as clearly expressed above, was based on extremely important considerations. In actual fact, in the early phase of Islam (as well as in the later phase) *dawah* and reform

works had to be performed, without which the history of Islam would not have been complete. If the ulema of the Muslim community had tried to pose a threat to the political institutions, certainly all this constructive work would have been left undone. That is why the Prophet of Islam expressly prohibited any clash with political institutions. This avoidance of strife guaranteed that non-political constructive work would continue to be performed without any break.

In every society there are always two systems side by side, one political and the other non-political. The latter is established through various non-political institutions. According to the scheme of Islam, non-political institutions established at the social level have always to remain stable. In this way there is a continuing endeavour – even when the political institutions have become corrupt, or keep changing – to keep Islam firmly established at the level of the non-political system.

The Command of War in Islam

It is a fact that certain verses in the Qur'an convey the command to do battle (*qital*) (22:39). What the special circumstances are which justify the issuance of and compliance with this command we learn from our study of the Qur'an.

1. The first point to be noted is that aggression or the launching of an offensive by the believers is not totally forbidden. It is permissible, but with certain provisos. We are clearly commanded in the Qur'an: Fight for the sake of God those that fight against you, *but do not be aggressive.* (2:190)

2. Only defensive war is permitted in Islam. Such a war is one in which aggression is committed by some other party so that the believers have to fight in self-defence. Initiating hostility is not permitted for Muslims. The Qur'an says: "They were the first to attack you." (9: 13)

Furthermore, even in the case of the offensive being launched by an opposing group, the believers are not supposed to retaliate immediately. Rather in the beginning all efforts are to be made to avert war, and only when avoidance has become impossible is battle to be resorted to inevitably in defence.

3. According to the Qur'an there was one form of war which was time-bound strictly in relation to its purpose. This was to put an end *to fitna* 'Fight against them until *fitna* is no more.' (2: 193) In this verse *fitna* signifies that coercive system which had reached the extremes of religious persecution. In ancient times this coercive political system prevailed all over the world. This absolutism had closed all the doors of progress, both spiritual and material. At that time God commanded the believers to break this coercive system in order to usher in freedom, so that all doors of spiritual and material progress might be opened to man.

This mission was undertaken and brought to a successful conclusion at the internal level within Arabia during the life of the Prophet. Later, during the pious caliphate, the Sasanid and Byzantine empires were dismantled with special divine succour. Consequently, intellectual oppression at the international level was replaced by intellectual freedom.

In this connection those traditions are worth noting which are enshrined in Sahih al-Bukhari. When, after the fourth caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib, political conflict ensued between Abdullah ibn Zubayr and the Umayyads, Abdullah ibn Umar, the senior most companion of the Prophet held himself aloof from the battle. People approached him and, quoting the verse of *qital-e-fitna*, asked him why he was not joining in the battle. Abdullah ibn Umar replied that *fitna* as mentioned in the Qur'an did not refer to political infighting, but rather to the religious coercive system, that had already been put to an end by them. (Fathul Bari, 8/60)

From this we learn that the war against *fitna* was a war of limited duration, meant to be engaged in only until its specific purpose had been served.

Invoking the Quranic exhortation to do battle against *fitna* in order to validate acts of war which had quite other aims was improper. This verse could be cited only if the same state of affairs as existed at the time of its revelation, were to prevail once again.

The biographers of the Prophet of Islam have put the number of *ghazwa* (battle) at more than 80. This gives the impression that the Prophet of Islam in his 23-year prophetic career waged about four battles in a year. But this impression is entirely baseless. The truth is that the Prophet of Islam in his entire prophetic life, engaged in war only on three occasions. All the other incidents described as *ghazwa* were in actual fact examples of avoidance of war and not instances of involvement in battle.

For instance, in the books of seerah, the incident of Al-Ahzab is called a *ghazwa* (battle), whereas the truth is that on this occasion the armed tribes of Arabia, twelve thousand in number, reached the borders of Medina with all intentions of waging war, but the Prophet and his companions dug a deep trench between them, thus successfully preventing a battle from taking place. The same is the case with all the other incidents called *ghazwa*. The opponents of the Prophet repeatedly tried to get him embroiled in war, but on all such occasions, he managed to resort to some such strategy as averted the war, thus defusing the situation.

There were only three instances of Muslims really entering the field of battle – Badr, Uhud and Hunayn. But the events tell us that on all these occasions, war had become inevitable, so that the Prophet was compelled to encounter the aggressors in self-defence. Furthermore, these battles lasted only for half a day, each beginning from noon and ending with the setting of the sun. Thus it would be proper to say that the Prophet in his entire life span had actively engaged in war for a total of a day and a half. That is to say, the Prophet had observed the principle of non-violence throughout his 23-year prophetic career, except for one and a half days.

The Islamic method, being based totally on the principle of non-violence, it is unlawful for believers to initiate hostilities. Except in cases where self-defence has become inevitable, the Qur'an in no circumstance gives permission for violence.

The Modern Age and Non-Violence

The greatest problem facing Islam today is, as I see it, that Muslims have almost totally forgotten the *sunnah* (Prophet's way) of non-violence. In latter times when the Ottoman and Mughal empires disintegrated and problems like those besetting Palestine have had to be confronted by the faithful, Muslims all over the world have fallen a prey to negative reaction on a colossal scale; they have failed to remember that the policy of Islam is not that of violence but of non-violence. It is the result of this deviation, that despite almost a 100-years of bloody wars, Muslims have achieved no positive gain. Rather whatever they already had has been lost by them.

According to Imam Malik, later generations of this ummah (Muslim community) settled matters at issue in the same way that earlier generations had done, i.e. non-violent methods. Similarly, Muslims of modern times must likewise resort only to non-violent methods. Just as no gain could accrue from violent methods earlier, no gain can accrue from violent methods today.

The state of affairs of Muslims in modern times resembles that which prevailed at the time of Hudaibiya. Today once again – only on a far larger scale – this *hamiyat al-jahiliya* prejudices prevailing in pre-Islamic Arabia (48:28) is being displayed by the other party. In the first phase of Islam its solution lay in Muslims sedulously avoiding an equivalent display of prejudice, and in holding firmly *kalema at-taqwa* they became entitled to the succour of God and were granted a clear victory (48:26).

At the time of the Hudaibiya peace treaty, the Quraysh, who had secured the leadership of Arabia, were bent on waging war. The Kaabah was in their possession. They had expelled the Prophet and his companions from their home town. They had taken possession of Muslims' homes and other properties, and spared no effort in disseminating negative propaganda against Islam.

Given this state of affairs, there were only two options before the believers. One was to attempt to put an end to tyranny and launch an outright war on the other party in the name of securing their rights. The result of such a move would certainly have been further loss in terms of lives and property.

The second option was to remain patient in the face of immediate loss, be it political or material, and, in spite of the losses avail of whatever opportunities are already available. The Prophet of Islam and his companions chose this second course. The result was that in just a few years time the entire history of Arabia was altered for the better by an Islamic revolution.

The same state of affairs is widespread in modern times. Although today Muslims have suffered great losses, political and material, at the hands of other nations, there still exist a great number of opportunities only for self-betterment and for *dawah* work on a far larger scale. If availed of wisely, we can rewrite the history of Islam in magnificent terms.

The Manifestation of Religion

The aim of the revolution brought about by the Prophet and his companions in the seventh century is stated in the Qur'an to be *izhar-e-deen*. (*Izhar* in Arabic means dominance/ascendancy. Here *izhar-e-deen* signifies intellectual and ideological dominance, not political dominance. This means that in intellectual and ideological respects, God's religion assumes ascendancy over all other ideologies and religions.)

Law of Nature

William Penn was born in London in 1644 and died in 1718. A great advocate of religious tolerance he took part in both religion and politics. One of his sayings is as follows:

Let the people think they govern and they will be governed. William Penn said this on the basis of his study of history.

But this is not something related only to history, it is, in fact, a universal law of nature. It is established by God himself according to His own creation plan. This natural law set by the Almighty God has been described in these words in the Qur'an:

We alternate these days among mankind. (3:140)

By days here is meant the day of victory and defeat, of domination and subjugation. In this world just as everything else is for the purposes of test, so is political power. That is why it is granted to each group by turns, so that every group could be tested. In this world the state of domination and power is for test just as the state of subjugation and submission.

What is required from man is that when he is granted power he should not suffer from the psychology of pride and arrogance. And when man finds himself in a state of subjugation he should not fall prey to negative psychology. Either of the states should be acceptable to man as a matter of divine ordainment. In both the states man's eyes should be set on shouldering his own responsibilities rather than on the right or wrong attitude adopted by others.

This is a belief, of great reformatory influence, which keeps people away from political activities of negative nature. It enables man to save their capabilities from being wasted, and always engage themselves in beneficial and result-oriented actions. The loss of power is from God. Protesting against it is to protest against God. And is there anyone who can succeed in his protest against God?

Prayer

Man has been advised in the Qur'an to be steadfast in his prayer, for prayer fends away indecency and evil. When the Prophet of Islam was asked about this verse he said: If a person's prayer does not fend away indecency and evil then his prayer is not really prayer at all.

What is prayer? It is to remember the fact that man is living before a God who – though man cannot see Him – can see man. Whoever leaves the mosque with this fact firmly embedded in his mind cannot live forgetful of God. In prayer man testifies to the fact that God is the greatest of all beings. If one is truthful in one's testimony, then one will not claim greatness for oneself when one has finished praying. Whatever one recites in prayer is a covenant before God that one will keep his commandments; then how is it possible that one should leave the mosque and treat people with arrogance and contumacy? The actions of prayer are a manifestation of the fact that one's heart is full of fear and love for God. How can one claim to be full of fear and love for God in the mosque, and then live as if one knows neither fear or love for Him when one goes outside?

If one prays in the true spirit of prayer, then one's prayer will surely fend away indecency and evil. But if one's prayer is devoid of spirit, then it will be no more than a perfunctory action which has no connection with one's real life. It will be prayer in form, but not in reality: for it will not fend away indecency and evil.

It is as if one were to say: a son who stays lying down while he sees his father standing does not respect his father; a brother who sees his sister hungry and does not give her something to eat is not really a brother at all; the friendship of a person who hears of his friend's death and does not stop laughing is not really friendship at all.

The Example of the Prophet

At the time of the Prophet Muhammad there was a certain Musailma Ibn Hubaib who hailed from Yamama and falsely claimed to be a prophet of God. In the year 10 AH he sent two emissaries to the Prophet bearing a letter from him, with the following message:

From Musailma, the prophet of God, to Muhammad, the Prophet of God. Peace be upon you. I have been made your partner in prophethood. Half of the country of Arabia belongs to us, and half of it belong to the Quraish; but the Quraish tend to encroach on our territory."

When Musailma's envoys came before the Prophet, and the letter was read out, the Prophet asked them what they had to say. They replied that all they wanted to say was contained in Musailma's letter. "If it weren't for the fact that envoys must not be harmed," the Prophet told them, "I would have had you both killed." He then dictated the following letter to Musailma:

In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful. From the Prophet of God to Musailma, the liar. Peace be upon him who follows divine guidance. The earth is God's; He gives it to those whom he chooses of His servants. Happy shall be the lot of the righteous.

There are two lessons to be learnt from this episode. For one, it provides a comparison between a true and a false prophet. Musailma's letter is quite clearly that of a false prophet, for it makes nothing but material claims, whereas the Prophet's letter is quite clearly that of a true one, because it speaks only of the realms of God.

The other thing we can learn from the example set by the Prophet is that envoys of other nations should not be killed or harmed, even if they have committed the most heinous crimes. They should simply be sent back to their homelands. The Islamic procedure in this matter is the same as the internationally accepted one.

The difference between a believer and an unbeliever

The Qur'an says that on Judgement-day, when mankind is gathered before God, man will look upon his deeds. Those who denied God, and rebelled against Him, will behold the doom that awaits them. In anguish they will cry out: "Would that I were dust!" (78:40)

When Umar, the second caliph of Islam, lay on his death-bed, stricken by the dagger of Abu Lulu Firoz, his son, Abdullah Ibn Umar was resting his father's head in his lap. "Rub my cheek in the dust, Abdullah," Umar said to him. Abdullah Ibn Umar did so. Then, with his head resting on the ground, Umar addressed these words to himself:

"Woe betide you, Umar, and woe betide the one who gave birth to you, if God does not forgive you." (Tabqat Ibn Saad)

If one compares both these events, one will find that the very words uttered by unbelievers in the next world, are those uttered by believers in this world. In the life after death, unbelievers will wish they were dust. But here we have a believer saying, before he dies, in this life on earth: "Join me with the dust."

Who dare rebel against God when He appears before man? Everyone will submit to Him then. But the only creditable submission of God is that which comes before He makes Himself manifest. Unbelievers will bow to God when He reveals Himself before them. But a believer bows to Him while He is still invisible.

The only reason that people rebel against God is that He is not now present before them. But how can one rebel against Him when He manifests Himself in all His might? Man is cowed into submission before a lion. How then can he dare otherwise when he comes face to face with God, the creator of the lion?

The truth is that a believer experiences in this world what an unbeliever will experience in the next world. An unbeliever will humble himself on seeing God; a believer does so without seeing Him.

Islam – A Culture of Peace

The Model World according to Islam, is a world of peace. Islam in itself means a religion of peace. The Qur'an says: And God calls to the home of peace. This is the message of Islam to mankind. It means that Build a world of peace on earth so that you may be granted a world of peace in your eternal life in the Hereafter.

Now what are the basic elements of building a culture of peace, according to Islam, to be brief, these are three – compassion, forgiveness and respect for all.

Let's take compassion first. If you go through the Qur'an and hadith, you will find many verses in the Qur'an and hadith which lay great stress on compassion. For instance, the Prophet of Islam said: O people, be compassionate to others so that you may be granted compassion by God.

Thus Islam makes compassion a matter of self-interest for every man. As one's own future depends on one's compassionate behaviour to other fellowmen. In this way Islam motivates us to be compassionate in our dealing with each other. If one wants to receive God's grace one will have to show compassion to others.

Let's take forgiveness. The Qur'an has to say this in this regard "when they are angered, they forgive." There are a number of verses in the Qur'an which promote forgiveness.

Then there is a hadith. Once a person came to the Prophet and asked him, "O Prophet, give me a master advice by which I may be able to manage all the affairs of my life." The Prophet replied: "Don't be angry." It means that 'forgive people even at provocation.' That is, adopt forgiveness as your behaviour at all times.

Now let's take the third principle—Respect for all. There is a very interesting story, recorded by Al-Bukhari in this regard.

The Prophet of Islam once saw a funeral procession passing by a street in Madina. The Prophet was seated at that time. On seeing the funeral the Prophet stood up in respect. At this one of his companions said: 'O Prophet, it was the funeral of a Jew (not a Muslim). The Prophet replied: 'Was he not a human being?' What it meant was that every human being is worthy of respect. There may be differences among people regarding religion and culture, but everyone has to respect the other. For, according to Islam, all men and women are blood brothers and blood sisters. And all are creatures of one and the same God.

These three principles are the basic pillars to form a peaceful society. Wherever these three values are to be found the result no doubt will be a society of peace and harmony.

The above references are enough to show that Islam is a culture of peace. It is true that some Muslims are engaged in violence in the name of Islam. But you will have to differentiate between Islam and Muslims. You have to see Muslims in the light of Islam and not vice versa.

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The most worthwhile work is preaching the word of God

The Prophet said: "That God should grant guidance, through you, to just one person is better for you than everything on which the sun rises."

Nightly Preparation for a Mighty Task

The chapter of the Qur'an entitled "Al-Muzzammil" (The Mantled One) commences with these verses:

"You who are wrapped up in your mantle, keep vigil all night, save for a few hours: half the night, or a little less or a little more: and with measured tone recite the Qur'an. We are about to lay a weighty message upon you. It is in the hours of the night that impressions are strongest and words most certain; in the day-time you are hard-pressed with work. Remember the name of your Lord and dedicate yourself to Him utterly." (7:1-8)

From these verses it is clear that God requires His servants to be so devoted to divine service that they rise at night in order to perform their duties to the Lord. To forsake one's sleep and spend the night hours in pursuit of a cause indicates the highest level of dedication; it shows that one has associated oneself utterly with the object of one's dedication, and will soon be in a position to represent it in the world.

This applies to worldly pursuits also. Almost all the individuals who have reached great heights in any field have been those who were willing to stay awake at nights in order to gain proficiency in it.

The case of Severiano Ballesteros, the Spanish golfer, provides apt illustration of this point. Ballesteros is not indisputably one of the two greatest golfers in the world and has won millions of dollars in numerous victories in tournaments on both sides of the Atlantic. There was a time, however, when he was just a poor caddy at Pedereda in Spain. He once told Frank Keating of the Guardian newspaper how he used to get up at night to hit a 100 or so balls "at the moon." He could not see them – "but I can tell how good and straight I hit them by the feel in hands and the sand."

To become a true Muslim is to become a personification of Islam in the eyes of the world; it is to become so associated with Islam that one is fit to carry its message to far corners of the globe. This requires intense preparation, which must be conducted in a spirit keen enough to fuel one for work through the night hours. Success does not come in mundane fields without such dedication. How, then, can it come in the field of divine service, for there is no task more difficult, and more strewn with obstacles – both within and without – than that of carrying the flame of true faith in God before the world.

God helps those who have lost all for His sake

The Prophet Abraham was born in the Iraqian town of Ur. When his opponents made life impossible for him there, God commanded him to proceed to the Arab desert. There, in the uninhabited valley of Mecca, he built the House of God. One of the prayers that he uttered on this occasion was this:

‘Lord, I have settled some of my offspring in a barren valley near Your Sacred House, so that they may observe the prayer. Put in the hearts of men kindness towards them, and provide them with the earth’s fruits, so that they may give thanks. Lord, You have knowledge of all that we hide and all that we reveal: nothing in heaven or earth is hidden from God.’ (14:38).

There is great symbolic importance attached to this event in the life of Abraham. Here history speaks, telling us what happens to God’s servant who arises to preach the message of truth in all its purity: he is rejected by the conventional order; religious institutions refuse to acknowledge him; he even becomes unappealing to friends and relatives. The cultivated valleys of the world, despite all their fertility, become dry for him. He is forced to take his wife and family to live in a barren land. There, he calls upon his Lord: “Lord,” he says, ‘they have no one to help them but You. The world of man has refused to support them; now You make springs gush forth beneath their feet.’

This is an extremely delicate moment in the history of man. The pulse of the universe stops beating at such a time. The earth, and all heavenly bodies, await new instructions before continuing their course. Man sees a new and unfamiliar happening. “Spring” gush forth in the desert. The blessings of God start descending from above. Winds scatter the words of the preacher among mankind. God, in all His might, comes to the assistance of His servants – the ones who were scorned and deprived of all assistance by people of the world. To preach the pure truth is the most difficult task beneath the heavens; but it is this task that draws God’s succour more than any other. This succour only comes, however, when the preacher of God’s word has fully communicated his message, and people’s persecution of him as a result has reached its climax.

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Even self-sacrifice is of no value without total sincerity

A certain Muslim participated in the Battle of Uhud (3 AH) and died fighting. When his mother learnt of the death, she cried out for her “martyred” son. “Hold your peace,” the Prophet told her. “How do you know that he has been martyred? He used to indulge in vain talk and was miserly with things that it would have done him no harm to give away.”

(Al-Tirmidhi, *Shama'il*)

A good deed is of no value if it makes one proud

Ibn Ataullah As-Sikandari wrote in his book, Al-Hikam: "A sin which makes one meek and humble is better than a good deed which makes one proud and arrogant."

Forgiveness – An Islamic Virtue

Islam attaches great importance to the concept of pardoning of sins by Allah so that one may be saved from Hell–fire. On several occasions, the Qur'an gives such prayers as 'Pardon us, forgive us our sins, and have mercy upon us' (Qur'an 2:286). Allah assures us that no matter what our sin, if we truly repent and seek His forgiveness, and take steps to put right our wrongs, He will forgive us. The Prophet Muhammad said, "My heart is clouded until I have asked God's forgiveness seventy times during the day and night."

We are likewise asked to show mercy to our fellow men. (90:17) Since God is Himself forgiving, He desires that people should cultivate this attribute and show forgiveness to other human beings. (The Qur'an, 24:22; 64:14).

The Prophet Muhammad taught his followers that the individual who pardons his enemy, even while having the power to extract revenge, will be nearest to God in the Hereafter. Once the Prophet was asked, "How many times are we to forgive our servants' faults?" He remained silent. The questioner repeated his question. But the Prophet gave no answer. But when the person asked a third time, he said, "Forgive your servant seventy times a day."

The Qur'an makes it clear that a strong, adverse, emotional reaction such as anger does not befit the true believer, and instead cites as a mark of excellence the quality of forgiveness: "When they become angry, they are forgiving." (42:37)

The most worthwhile work is preaching the word of God

The Prophet said: "That God should grant guidance, through you, to just one person is better for you than everything on which the sun rises."